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AUTHOR de Setton, Lea S.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Because little was known about children with behavior problems in the public schools of the Republic of Panama, researchers studied 100 Panamanian third-grade students with behavior problems. Most subjects were male, scored low on intelligence and achievement measures, and were from low income families. Variables investigated included behavior, self-concept, parents' child-rearing practices, and family environment. Data were obtained from students, their teachers, and family members. Measures used included the Spanish translated versions of the Revised Behavior Problem Checklist, the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, the Cornell Parent Behavior Description, and the Family Environment Scale. In general, the third-grade students were low in self-concept, cognitive processing, and intellectual maturity. They also demonstrated a variety of behavior problems. The children perceived their family environment as independent and expressive, with hardly any control and recreation; they indicated that they often received support from their parents. A multimodal treatment approach was recommended as a means to alleviate the problems faced by the children. (RH)

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Selected Behavioral Characteristics of Misbehaved Third Grade Students in the Republic of Panama

Lea S. de Setton
Universidad Santa Maria La Antigua
Republic of Panama
Arlene Brett & Kamiar Kouzekanani
University of Miami

Reprints and additional information can be obtained from Lea S. de Setton, Ph.D., Box 318, Zone 1, Panama, Republic of Panama, (507) 640119.

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Abstract

One hundred third grade students with behavior problems in the public schools of the Republic of Panama were studied. The following variables were investigated: behavior, self-concept, child rearing practices, and family environment. The third graders were low in self-concept, cognitive processing, and intellectual maturity. They perceived their family environment as independent and expressive, with hardly any control and recreation, and some support from their parents. A multimodal treatment approach was recommended. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Environmental influence on educational performance and behavior have been investigated through studies of socioeconomic status, language and culture, rural-urban differences, school environment, and parental attitudes (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, V., 1974; McGuire, M.E., 1976; Baumrind, D., 1967).

Behavior disorders are becoming a very serious problem for the child, family, school, and society (Quay, H.C., & Werry, J.S., 1986; Patterson, G.R., 1982; Brown, A.L., 1975; Bandura, A., & Walters, R.A., 1963). It has been confirmed that laboratory-derived information on the development and regulation of children's behavior is inadequate and should be obtained in naturalistic settings (Clarke-Stewart, A., 1977; Mischel, W., 1970). Children with unattended behavior problems grow up to become a major problem for the society; a fact which is self-evident to all concerned individuals.

Very little is known about children with behavior problems in the public schools of the Republic of Panama, and because of this, it has been very difficult, if not impossible, to search for solutions. The primary purpose of this research investigation was to study a group of misbehaved students in the Republic of Panama with respect to the following variables: behavior, self-concept, child rearing practices, and the family environment.

Methodology

This was descriptive survey research of an exploratory

nature, conducted at the national level. The study was limited to third grade students. One hundred students, confirmed to have behavior problems and selected at random, their teachers (N = 100), and family members (72 mothers, 9 grandmothers, 4 aunts, 15 other, N = 100) participated in the study. The students ranged in age from eight to 13 years with 9.2 as the mean (SD = 1.1). The overwhelming majority (96%) of the third graders were male. The students were primarily from low income families. The students scored low on intelligence (measured by the Raven Coloured Progressive Matrices) and achievement (measured by the Stanford Diagnostic Test).

Results

The Spanish translated version of the Revised Behavior Problem Checklist (RBPC) (Quay, H.C., & Peterson, D.R., 1987) was used to measure the behavior variable. This is an 89-item questionnaire measuring six scales: conduct disorder (CD), socialized aggression (SA), attention problems-immaturity (AP), anxiety-withdrawal (AW), psychotic behavior (PB), and motor-tension excess (AP). Family members and teachers of the students completed the RBPC. Results indicated problems in all areas, with CD at the top followed by AP. Conduct disorder is known to be the primary type of childhood disorder which is predominate among boys and could manifest hyperactivity, attention problems, aggressiveness, and defect of empatic interpersonal relations. High AP scores may explain the existence of school-related

problems, confirmed by the achievement scores. Means and standard deviations for the RBPC scale scores are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

The Spanish translated version of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers, E.V., 1984) was used to assess how the third graders felt about themselves. This is an 80-item questionnaire which provides six cluster scales: behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction. As shown in Table 2 and Figure 1, most of the scores were lower than normally expected in every scale. The anxiety scale had the highest mean, indicating that the students' feelings of specific emotions, including worry, nervousness, shyness, sadness, and fear were adequate and within the normal range. The popularity scale scores reflected slight feelings of shyness and lack of interpersonal skills. The physical appearance indices indicated an adequate self-esteem in relation to body image. The behavior scale scores suggested that the students acknowledged their own behavior difficulties. The students' scores on the intellectual scale showed difficulties with school-related problems. The happiness scale had the lowest average score.

Insert Table 2 & Figure 1 About Here

The Spansih translated version of the Cornell Parent Behavior Description (Devereaux, E.C., Bronfenbrenner, V., & Rodgers, R., 1966) was used to measure the child rearing practices variable. This test has 29 items and quantifies the antecedents and consequences of children's perceptions of the behavior of their parents toward them. The test measures the following behavior variables: support (nurturance, instrumental companionship, principled discipline, praise), punishment (physical punishment, deprivation of privileges, verbal retribution), control (achievement demands, predictability of standards), rejection (absence of support), indulgence (absence of punishment), autonomy (absence of control), and miscellaneous (protectiveness). The statements were read to the students, and they reported the occurrence of the parental behavior during the past year (1 = never, 5 = very often). As shown in Table 3, the support variable had the highest mean for both mothers and fathers, indicating that the third graders received support from their parents fairly often; the parents were there if needed, to help, listen to problems, and comfort them. The indulgence variable had the lowest mean, perhaps children considered that sometimes parents let them off easy when they did something that their parents did not like.

Insert Table 3 About Here

The Spanish translated version of the Family Environment Scale (FES) (Moos, r., & Moos, B., 1974) and the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale (CVFES) (Pina, C., Simons, M., & Slawinowski, 1984) were used to measure the family environment variable. The FES and CVFES measure 10 scales related to social-environmental characteristics of all types of families; they are: cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, independence, achievement orientation, intellectual-cultural orientation, active-recreational orientation, moral-religious emphasis, organization, and control. As summarized in Table 4 and illustrated by Figure 2, family members perceived their families as controlled, indicating that set rules and procedures were used to run family life, and organized, reporting importance in structuring and planning activities and responsibilities, with little independence among members and low interest in recreational activities. The family environment, as perceived by the students, was independent and expressive, with minimal control and recreation. The independent scale is a goal-oriented dimension that measures the extent to which family members are assertive, self-sufficient, and make their own decisions. This variable demonstrated how independent the children felt, probably due to the lack of parental guidance. Expressiveness, a

relationship dimension, measures the extent to which family members are encouraged to act openly and to express their feelings directly. Conflict, also a relationship dimension, assesses the amount of openly expressed anger, aggression, and conflict. This scale, as reported by the children, had the lowest average score, indicating lack of conflict acknowledgement. Family members and the children agreed on the following scales: cohesion, achievement-orientation, active-recreational orientation, moral-religious emphasis, and organization. They disagreed on the expressiveness, conflict, independence, intellectual-cultural orientation, and control.

Insert Table 4 & Figure 2 About Here

Discussion

In general, the third graders were low in self-concept, cognitive processing, and intellectual maturity; they also demonstrated a variety of behavior problems. The children perceived their family environment as independent and expressive, with hardly any control and recreation; and indicated they often received support from their parents.

A multimodal treatment approach was recommended as a means to alleviate the problems faced by the children. The following points should be considered:

Behavior problems require special education provided by

trained teachers. In most countries mainstreaming is required; conduct difficulties can be attended to in regular classrooms, and at times students participate in special classes. Teachers and peers can be used as behavior modifiers. Behavioral orientation suggests the use of tokens to reinforce positive behavior. Psychoeducational orientation and affective education stress the importance of significant interactions and emotional well-being. Individual therapy is sometimes necessary. In certain circumstances family therapy is recommended, as well as other forms of therapeutic intervention. In many cases neurological evaluation and medication are required.

An individual educational plan has to be designed for each student. The plan should place primary emphasis on behavior difficulties, and then academics. Curriculum has to be meaningful, including positive learning experiences. It is also important to include a variety of remediation exercises to improve the students' perceptual and motor skills.

Environmental manipulation is also necessary. The community and the school can organize youth projects with the participation of professionals in other fields such as medicine, psychology, and social work. The program should emphasize parental education to improve communication and child rearing practices.

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Table 1

Means & Standard Deviations for RBPC T-Scores, as Reported by Family Members and Teachers.

Scale	Family Members M	Family Members SD	Teachers M	Teachers SD
Conduct Disorder	66.03	8.89	72.45	7.34
Socialized Aggression	60.67	7.78	63.69	6.76
Attention Problems	65.11	9.09	71.84	6.60
Anxiety-Withdrawal	63.41	8.54	65.86	7.93
Psychotic Behavior	57.09	13.64	66.86	10.93
Motor-Tension Excess	66.15	9.77	68.41	7.61

Table 2

Means & Standard Deviation for Piers-Harris Childrens's Self-Concept T-Scores.

Scale	M	SD
Behavior	33.32	10.41
Intellectual & School Status	32.50	10.09
Physical Appearance	37.60	10.45
Anxiety	44.20	9.51
Popularity	39.33	7.56
Happiness & Satisfaction	30.07	7.13

Table 3

Means & Standard Deviations for the Cornell Parent Behavior Description.

Behavior Variable*	Mother M	Mother SD	Father M	Father SD
Support	3.91	.74	3.91	.86
Punishment	3.23	.63	3.01	.81
Control	3.85	.74	3.83	.74
Rejection	3.26	1.11	2.91	1.06
Indulgence	2.77	.80	2.87	1.00
Autonomy	3.38	1.05	3.19	1.23
Protectiveness	3.73	1.06	3.62	1.08

* 1=never, 2=hardly ever, 3=sometimes, 4=fairly often 5=very often

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for the Family Environment Scale (FES) and the Children's Version of the Family Environment Scale (CVFES).

Scale	FES		CVFES	
	M	SD	M	SD
Cohesion	47.73	12.44	46.69	15.95
Expressiveness	49.15	10.06	53.80	12.55
Conflict	50.30	9.40	37.15	13.23
Independence	35.18	11.38	54.17	9.99
Achievement Orientation	49.19	7.31	48.00	14.84
Intellectual-Cultural Orientation	40.93	6.91	51.75	11.80
Avtive-Recreational Orientation	40.06	7.34	45.84	9.64
Moral-Religious Emphasis	52.44	6.62	51.83	11.55
Prganization	53.83	9.06	53.64	9.63
Control	55.65	7.51	49.83	10.70

FIGURE 1

PROFILE OF THE STUDENTS' SELF-CONCEPT
AS REPORTED ON THE PIERS-HARRIS

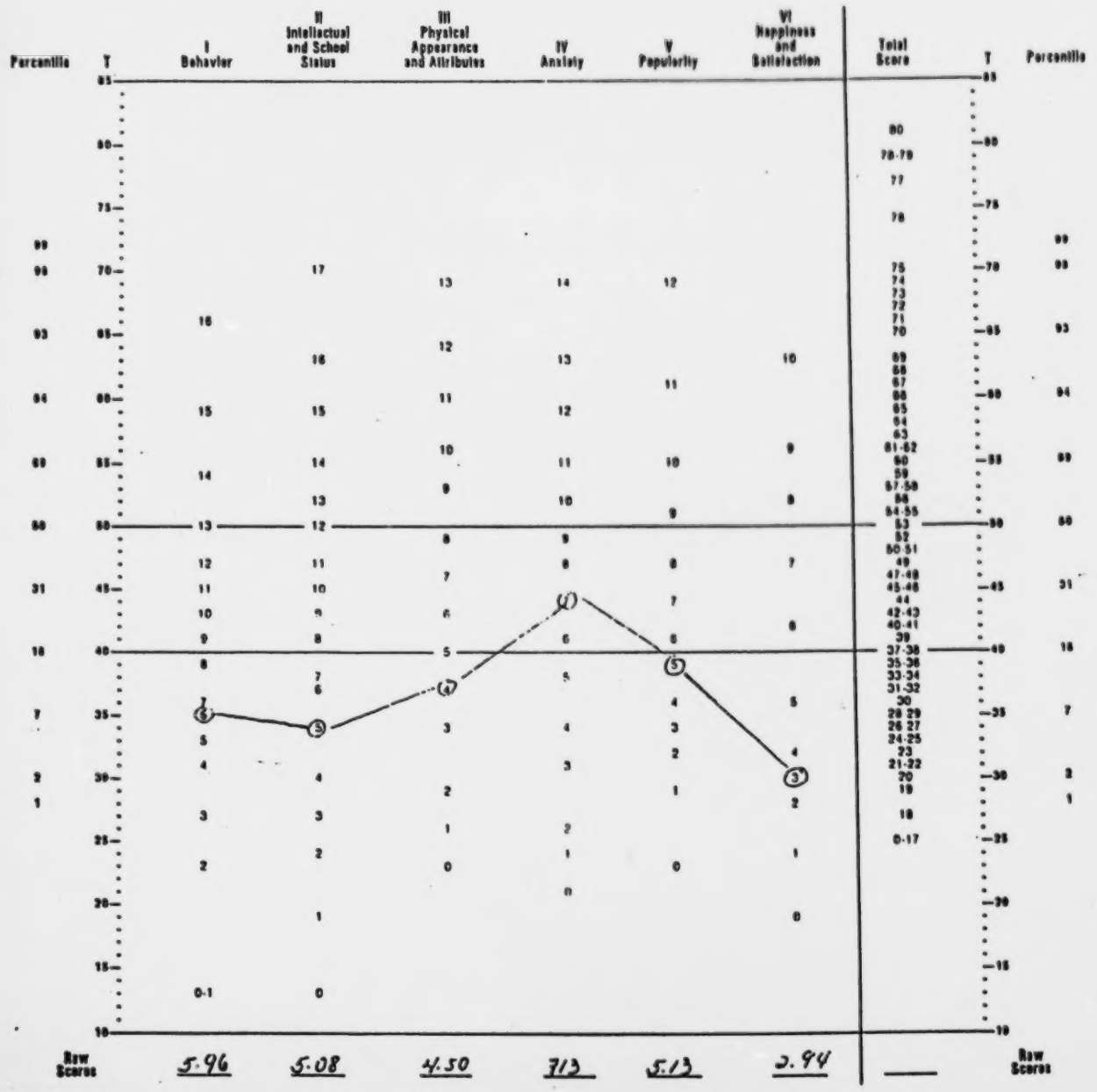

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FIGURE 2

PROFILES FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND STUDENTS
AS REPORTED BY THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT SCALE AND
THE CHILDREN'S VERSION OF THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT SCALE